Sage Health – ADHD (c)

Understanding the risks of ADHD stimulant medication

Note that stimulant medications such as methylphenidate and dexamphetamine are highly controlled substances, falling under the most restricted Schedule 8 category of medicines in Australia.

Whilst stimulants are widely used and well-studied, and many adults with ADHD benefit from them. Like all medicines, they can cause side effects and aren't right for everyone. Your clinician will talk through these with you before you start.

Common side effects
Many people notice some of these, especially in the first few weeks or after a dose change:

- Reduced appetite
- Trouble sleeping
- Headache or stomach upset
- Dry mouth
- Feeling jittery, restless, or more anxious
- Irritability or low mood as the medication wears off

These often settle or can be managed by adjusting the dose, timing, or type of medication.

Effects on your heart and blood pressure
Stimulants can raise your heart rate and blood pressure a little. For most people this isn't a problem, but it matters if you have a heart condition or a family history of heart problems. We'll check your blood pressure and pulse before you start and at regular reviews.

Effects on mood and mental health
Stimulants can make anxiety worse in some people. Rarely, they can trigger unusual thoughts, paranoia, or a manic episode, particularly in people with a personal or family history of bipolar disorder or psychosis. Tell us about any mental health history before starting.

Misuse and dependence
Stimulants are controlled medicines because they can be misused. When taken as prescribed, the risk of dependence is low. Please tell us if you have a history of alcohol or drug use. Never share your medication, as this is illegal and can be dangerous for others.

Other things to be aware of

- They can make tics or seizures worse in some people.

- They can interact with other medicines, including some antidepressants. Always tell us about everything you take, including supplements and over-the-counter products.
- Caffeine, energy drinks, and alcohol can affect how you feel on the medication.
- If you are pregnant, planning a pregnancy, or breastfeeding, talk to us first so we can weigh up the options together.

Get urgent help if you experience

- Chest pain, a racing or irregular heartbeat, or fainting
- Severe headache, weakness on one side, or trouble speaking
- Seeing or hearing things that aren't there, or feeling intensely paranoid
- A painful erection lasting more than four hours
- Thoughts of harming yourself

Call triple zero (000) or go to your nearest emergency department. For non-urgent concerns, contact us via text or email as soon as you can.

What we do to keep you safe

- A thorough assessment of your medical, mental health, and substance use history
- Baseline checks and regular follow-ups
- Starting at a low dose and adjusting gradually
- Reviewing whether the medication is working for you, and changing or stopping it if it isn't

Never stop or change your medication without talking to us first. If side effects are bothering you, let us know, as there are usually options.

This information is general and does not replace advice from your doctor or pharmacist.